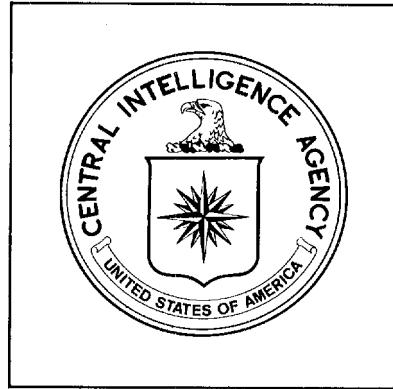


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**Middle East
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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Mauritania

Another Saharan Liberation Group

The newspaper of Mauritania's ruling party announced on November 17 the creation of a new Saharan liberation organization, the Front for the Liberation and Reincorporation of the Sahara into Mauritania (FLRSM). The group, clearly a creature of President Moktar Ould Daddah's regime, is said to be composed of prominent Saharans from the southern part of Spanish Sahara and former members of a now defunct Spanish-supported Saharan party.

Nouakchott's purpose in forming the new group is to ensure that it has an organized voice within the territory that will support union of at least the southern sector with Mauritania when the Spanish leave. Existence of the FLRSM provides Mauritania with its own organization of controlled nationalists in the event the consultation with Saharans envisaged by the recent tripartite agreement between Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania takes the form of a referendum. The group will serve to counter the Moroccan supported Liberation and Unity Front.

Mauritania's action presumably is designed in part to strengthen its bargaining position in future negotiations with Morocco over dividing the Sahara. Rabat and Nouakchott have agreed in principle on partitioning the territory but they have probably yet to agree on where the line is to be drawn.

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India*New Round of Criticism of US*

Criticism of the US by Prime Minister Gandhi and other top Indian officials, a recurrent phenomenon that recently has been in a quiet phase, has risen again since mid-November. Both domestic and foreign policy concerns may account for the new round.

Gandhi, in remarks directed primarily at the US, spoke out several times last week against "some countries" which, she said, have complained about setbacks to democracy in India while working in other countries to overthrow democratic governments and support authoritarianism. Foreign Minister Chavan, speaking at the opening of a Communist-sponsored "International Conference Against Fascism" in Calcutta, warned of dangers posed by "imperialists and their agents."

Government press censors, meanwhile, allowed the Communist press and a newspaper that supports Gandhi's Congress Party to claim last week that the US was involved in the political upheavals that have wracked neighboring Bangladesh since August. The pro-Congress paper accused the US ambassador in Dacca of playing a "significant role" in the coups there.

Except for Gandhi's critical reaction in September to comments on India by President Ford, the current criticism is the first of any consequence since several leading Congress Party leftists--but not Gandhi--made anti-US statements at another "anti-fascist" convention last May.

█████████████████████ one or more of the following factors may account for the Prime Minister's current pique:

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--She may genuinely suspect the US was somehow involved in the events in Bangladesh, or she might be claiming foreign involvement there in order to provide a justification for possible Indian intervention in the months ahead.

--She may be unhappy about American criticism of her domestic policies. She may also feel that the general improvement in US-Indian relations over the past couple of years has not yielded sufficient benefits for India.

--She may be setting the stage for a new effort to discredit her domestic opponents through claims that they have foreign links.

--She may believe that allegations against the US will help her reinvigorate domestic support for the state of emergency.

[REDACTED] there has lately been a slackening of the public enthusiasm that marked the first months following declaration of the emergency last June.

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